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The Therapy That Can Break You Internal Family Systems is a widely popular trauma treatment. Some patients say it's destroyed their lives.

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OCT. 30, 2025

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Bobby Lerz put his 16-year-old daughter on a plane in New York so she could check into an eating-disorder clinic in Missouri. As a little girl, Elizabeth was "vivacious, gregarious, everybody's best friend," he tells me. But she struggled as a teenager. She was cutting classes, and Bobby observed her engaging in what seemed to be restrictive behaviors around food, sometimes using meals as bargaining chips: *I'll eat this if I get that.*

One day, Elizabeth brought home a brochure from the Castlewood Treatment Center. It looked like a luxury retreat: a modernist residential facility perched in the bluffs overlooking the Meramec River outside St. Louis. She begged to go, Bobby says, and, in 2011, he and her mother agreed. "When your daughter tells you she might have an eating disorder, your heart stops and you say, 'Okay, anything it takes to get you fixed,'" he says.

Several weeks in, strange things started happening. Elizabeth called to tell him that she had enjoyed bartending at his tavern. Bobby, who once worked as a chef for Howard Stern and owned a bar upstate, told her that had never happened. He wouldn't let a teenager bartend, nor would his clientele. "It was a cop bar," he says.

"I could tell that I was on speakerphone, and I felt like I was in a therapeutic session," he says. "I heard snickering and girls in the background."

Not long after that, Bobby says, Elizabeth sent her stepsister — the daughter of Irene, whom Bobby had married in 2002 — an unsettling text, asking if Bobby had ever touched her inappropriately. When Bobby heard about it, he confronted Elizabeth: Why was she asking these awful questions? She'd just had a bad dream, he recalls her telling him. That, he adds, was "the last thing she ever said to me."

The next time Bobby saw his daughter was at a New York State Child Protective Services office. Four months after she'd gone into treatment in 2011, the agency, along with the Schenectady County Department of Social Services, launched an investigation into allegations Elizabeth had made against her father while at Castlewood. She claimed he had been raping her since she was 4 and alleged, in explicit detail, that numerous other men — including his friends, his bar's patrons, and local police officers — had joined in the abuse.

At the hearing, Bobby had trouble recognizing her. Once an accomplished cross-country runner, she was now chain-smoking. And when she took the stand, Bobby watched in horror as she appeared to act out different characters. One was called "manager" and another one "firefighter," he says. She'd clench her fists and puff out her chest — that was "'protec-*tor*!'" Irene recalls, imitating the persona's low, booming voice. "It rings in my head how she would say that."

"After she testified — and it was the most glaringly sexual, disgusting, deviant testimony you ever heard — she gets up and she pirouettes like a ballerina out of the courtroom," Bobby says. "It was heartbreaking." Bobby denied the allegations then and still does. "I was investigated by everybody — state troopers, Child Protective Services, my local police," he adds. They probed Irene, too, who was at risk of losing custody of her own daughter, who is about the same age as Elizabeth. In the end, Bobby says he was told by investigators, "'there is nothing here.'"

In 2012, a judge ruled Elizabeth's account "incredible." Bobby was told that her claims were inconsistent and her evidence contradicted itself. "The timelines weren't there. There was no corroboration. She had made up names," he says. After $45,000 in legal fees, there was at least a measure of vindication when the allegations were expunged from his record. But his relationship with his daughter was irreparably damaged. Despite the judge's finding, Elizabeth, which is not her real name, maintains her allegations against her father; her mother supports her version of events. Bobby, now a 61-year-old security guard, remains baffled at how his daughter, in just four months, turned into a stranger.

"We have spent 14 years just theorizing," Bobby says.

"Why Choose Castlewood Treatment Center?" read the brochure Elizabeth brought home. Beside its intimate ten-bed residential facility and the beautiful landscape, Castlewood, the pamphlet emphasized, had expertise in Internal Family Systems, a therapy centered on "the idea that each individual has multiple selves," known as *parts*. In IFS, a part isn't a metaphor. It's a literal personality with its own identity, age, feelings, even body. Traditionally, "a person with separate autonomous personalities is viewed as sick or damaged" and might be diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, according to Richard C. Schwartz, who conceived of the therapy in the 1980s and brought it to Castlewood in the early aughts. "What are called *alters* in those people are the same as what I call parts in IFS, and they exist in all of us." To him, that's a good thing: By singling out parts, locating them in our bodies, and engaging them in conversation, IFS is said to relieve even the most severely traumatized people of their emotional burdens.

In recent years, the practice has exploded in social media. TikTok is flooded with millions of videos mentioning IFS, including those of people role-playing and analyzing their parts, and more than 45,000 mental-health practitioners in the *Psychology Today* database offer it as a treatment. Schwartz's educational center, the IFS Institute, will have trained 15,000 therapists in the method by the end of this year, and another 5,000 are on a waiting list.

Celebrities have helped spread the word: Gwyneth Paltrow has praised IFS on her *Goop* podcast, and the writer Elizabeth Gilbert credited it with healing a toxic friendship. IFS "offers each of us nothing less than the cultivation of kindness, wisdom, and empowerment," writes Alanis Morissette in the introduction to Schwartz's 2021 book, *No Bad Parts*.

The scientific community takes a much less enthusiastic view of the practice. A growing number of psychiatrists and psychologists — who, at the doctoral level, study the brain and mind, unlike counselors and family therapists — are emerging with urgent warnings about the therapy, casting IFS as a simplistic allegory at best and, at the worst, a dangerous pseudoscience. While some patients find relief through IFS, critics argue that's likely owing to the way it shifts responsibility for one's actions onto another persona or the fact that it recycles aspects of traditional talk therapy that are, in fact, helpful. "I'm aware of how trendy it has become," says Lynn Bufka, the head of practice at the American Psychological Association. There may be "elements of this intervention that are pretty standard and cut across what might be good psychotherapy, but the way it's packaged or described? Those ideas don't have a scientific basis."

For patients with vulnerabilities like complex PTSD, disordered eating, or psychosis — many of the very people IFS practitioners are taught to treat — the therapy could destabilize already fragile mental states. An "unstable sense of self," for example, is a defining feature of borderline personality disorder, a condition that commonly occurs alongside anorexia and bulimia. Last year, Lisa Brownstone, a University of Denver psychologist and eating-disorder specialist, co-wrote a report that raised questions about the risks of IFS. Brownstone had become alarmed after multiple patients appeared "disorganized and confused by treatments they had received from other providers that were IFS or IFS-informed," she says. "The process of splitting apart and having them speak from different perspectives within themselves can start to make it even less clear what their reality is."

Former Castlewood patients told me they had witnessed women crawling around like babies or lying in fetal positions. "It wasn't uncommon to see people shaking on the floor," says Kimberly MacDonald. Another used to run in circles screaming. In the span of a second, someone could switch ages, genders, even species. Another ex-patient described how a transformation might come on: A person would "start to twist their body, like some weird exorcism thing, scrunch their face," and say in a girlish voice, "Hi, I'm willow tree."

Over time, traumas that patients would divulge early in their stays snowballed to gruesome extremes. Some say they gathered in group sessions to listen to stories of parents pimping out their daughters to entire neighborhoods, a grandmother molesting a child in a bathtub, a child forced into a meat locker with dead animals, someone who claimed to recover memories of sexual abuse as an infant. "It was almost like people wanted to one up each other," says Maria Frisch, who was the research director of the center in 2011. "Really horrific things absolutely do happen. But do they only happen to people who went to Castlewood?"

In 2011, Lisa Nasseff was the first of four former Castlewood patients to sue the center and its co-founder and co-director, the psychologist Mark Schwartz. (No relation to Richard Schwartz.) She claimed that he took advantage of her malnourished, medicated, and emotionally distressed state to make her believe that she'd been repeatedly raped and was once part of a satanic cult and that he convinced her "to become increasingly isolated from her family and friends" by implicating them in the crimes she alleged. Then came lawsuits from Leslie Thompson, who said she recovered false memories of rape and participating in a cult that ate babies; Colette Travers, who claimed that therapists conjured memories of sexual abuse at the hands of family members and classmates; and Brooke Taylor, who said that she, too, was led to falsely accuse relatives of sexual abuse.

By then, Mark Schwartz had sold a stake in Castlewood to the private-equity firm Trinity Hunt Partners. In 2017, another private-equity firm, Riverside Co., took it over and renamed it Alsana. Last year, Alsana shut down its Missouri center for good but continues to operate

four facilities in California and one in Alabama that have faced complaints similar to Castlewood's.

The State of Missouri censured Mark Schwartz's license, and he agreed not to seek its renewal. After the lawsuits were settled, he moved to California, where he continues to treat patients with IFS at a facility in Monterey called Harmony Place. Richard Schwartz has never publicly addressed the scandal at Castlewood. Earlier this year, he spoke at an Alsana-sponsored conference on "the power of Internal Family Systems in treating eating disorders."

"That just breaks my heart that he's a celebrity," says one former patient, referring to Richard Schwartz. "There is no evidence IFS works. It's a sham, and it's dangerous."

When I meet Richard Schwartz over Zoom, he is sitting in front of an art print that reads "It's Never Too Late to Come Home to Your Self." It's September, and he is in the middle of a busy fall schedule planning his annual IFS conference, where 1,000 tickets are on sale for three days of workshops. A stiff 76-year-old with a white goatee and black-frame glasses, he explains his life's work with the dryness of a tax accountant itemizing deductions.

The origins of IFS can be traced back to Schwartz's childhood. His father was a prominent endocrinologist in Chicago who expected Richard, the eldest of six boys, to follow suit. While three of his brothers went on to become physicians, Schwartz didn't have the grades for medical school. "I'm convinced that the model wouldn't exist if he had been a nicer father," Schwartz says of IFS. "I was determined to prove that I was valuable."

After earning a Ph.D. in marriage and family therapy from Purdue University in 1980, Schwartz got a job at the University of Illinois Chicago's training program in family systems, a popular model that advocated treating families as single emotional units. Unlike psychologists, family therapists "didn't pay much attention to the mind at all," Schwartz writes in *No Bad Parts*. "We thought the therapists who mucked around in that inner world were wasting their time, because we could change all that simply by changing external relationships."

As Schwartz listened to his patients, many of them juveniles struggling with eating disorders, PTSD, and multiple personalities, he noticed how often they spoke about themselves in terms of their parts. Some parts were self-critics, others were repressed inner children. Schwartz came to call our most painful parts "exiles" who are kept at bay by "protectors," another category that includes sub-personalities such as the perfectionist "managers" and impulsive "firefighters."

"It sounded like parts had these alliances with each other against other parts," Schwartz tells me. "It sounded like an inner family." It occurred to him that he could simply apply family systems theory to treat an individual mind by helping the various parts listen and talk to one another. "I was able to just overlay a lot of that way of working onto these inner systems, and it's held up really well," Schwartz says.

He soon ran into problems. Some patients were getting worse. "These inner systems are quite delicate, especially in the kinds of people I was working with back then, and I made mistakes in the early days that really hurt my clients," he says. He recalled trying to browbeat one woman's self-harming part to stop cutting her wrists, only for her to show up the next day with a gash on her face. Schwartz shares this anecdote often to convey the profound lesson it taught him: A therapist must not try to dominate a patient's "bad" parts but instead welcome them into the room as the "sacred, spiritual beings" they actually are.

While a traditional therapist might describe these parts as feelings or behaviors, Schwartz's revelation — to treat parts with kindness and curiosity rather than judgment — has been a foundational therapeutic principle for over a century. In fact, many of IFS' central ideas aren't new. Freud identified the mind's parts as the id, ego, and superego in 1923; Jung had his archetypes and shadow selves. In the 1930s, the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein developed object-relations theory to describe how infants turn caregivers into internal objects that shape their future relationships. Healthy early relationships create an integrated self, while unhealthy ones can lead a person into "splitting"—a tendency to divide people into one-dimensional categories of either all good or all bad.

Schwartz's colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois Chicago predicted many of the issues his critics are observing today. When he first presented his model to a group of residents, physicians, and medical students in the 1980s, "people stood up and said I was dangerous. I was fragmenting people. They tried to get me fired," he tells me. "It was quite humiliating, and I gave up on trying to break into that field and decided to go grassroots."

Schwartz saw himself as a disrupter of the academic Establishment that shunned him. He started writing books and training clinicians independently and, in 2000, he founded the Center for Self-Leadership (later renamed the IFS Institute) in Oak Park, Illinois. "Initially, we would take people who weren't licensed therapists, so we would take coaches in the trainings or teachers or massage people," he says.

Richard Schwartz in a video introduction to Internal Family Systems. Photo: Internal Family Systems/YouTube

Then, in 2015, "something happened; there was a shift," Schwartz says. IFS took off in part because the animated movie *Inside Out* "helped with the popularity of the model. It normalized the multiplicity phenomenon for the culture," he says. At the time, other 1990s-era trauma therapies were also regaining favor, including EMDR, somatic experiencing, and "the whole repressed and recovered memory stuff," says Richard McNally, the clinical training director at Harvard's psychology department who has debunked those theories. "It's a revenant that keeps popping out of the grave."

Schwartz's friend Bessel van der Kolk, once a leading proponent of recovered-memory therapy who was pushed out of Harvard in the 1990s, made a comeback in 2014 with his mega best seller *The Body Keeps the Score*, which suggests that we physically store memories of trauma we can't consciously access; it includes a chapter on IFS. Van der Kolk and a host of other influencer-therapists — including Gabor Maté, a family physician who has been criticized for styling himself as an expert on psychiatric disorders, and Thomas Hübl, whose Ph.D. is from Ubiquity, a California university that's unaccredited in the U.S. — legitimized Schwartz's budding practice with flattering endorsements. Celebrity acolytes joined the chorus, too. "The whole parts thing is really ferosh," *Queer Eye*'s Jonathan Van Ness wrote in his memoir.

"This popularity thing is really hard for me to get used to because I spent probably 30 years in relative obscurity feeling like, *Why don't people get this?*" Schwartz tells me. "It's in some ways a dream come true, and in some ways it brings a lot more complications, too."

One of Richard Schwartz's early trainees was Castlewood's Mark Schwartz, who learned the method and then became an assistant instructor. In the early aughts, Mark hired Richard as a consultant to treat Castlewood patients and train staff. Over the next decade at Castlewood, Richard and Mark emphasized "the importance of working with the eating disordered part of self that encapsulates the trauma of the past." In promotional materials, Richard was described as "integral to Castlewood," and Richard in turn praised the facility: "Unlike so many treatment centers, Castlewood helps clients heal the pain that underlies their eating disorders rather than just manage the symptoms," he wrote. "I wish I could send them all my traumatized clients, not just those with eating disorders."

Mark and his wife, Lori Galperin, came up as therapists through the Masters and Johnson Institute, a proponent in the 1970s of conversion therapy. By the early 1990s, the couple with matching blond bobs were dubbed "the Sonny and Cher of trauma" by *Vanity Fair* for shifting their attention from marital woes to sexual abuse, "a growing, controversial, potentially profitable field." Mark led yearly workshops at van der Kolk's trauma conference at Harvard and, in 1999, he and Lori founded the Castlewood Treatment Center in Ballwin, Missouri.

Their background made sense for Castlewood if you believed, as they did, that an astounding one-in-three young girls are sexually abused and that the substantial majority of women with eating disorders are among them. The consensus in the medical community today is that eating disorders are no more linked to sexual abuse than they are other types of trauma or to unrelated genetic and environmental factors, according to Jennifer Thomas, co-director of the Eating Disorders Clinical and Research Program at Mass General. But Mark and Lori argued that nearly every patient they saw at Masters and Johnson could be treated for sexual trauma. "Often," *St. Louis* magazine reported in 1998, their "clients end up accusing their relatives of sexual abuse."

Mark, who describes himself as a rebel and admits his approach to therapy is provocative, is more open than many psychologists to unproven modalities. When he first attended one of Richard's IFS workshops in Chicago in the early aughts, "I immediately realized that what he was doing was very different than anything I'd seen before," he tells me. IFS "turbocharges

your process," and that's significant at a time when "insurance companies have forced us to find ways to get to this deeper work faster."

IFS has also allowed him to be more creative. "As a psychologist, you emphasize that you're a scientist and what you do is empirically determined. If a person says they're suicidal, there's four or five ways you handle that, so you become kind of a technician," he says. With IFS, "you can allow yourself to be a healer and really join with the client."

Former patients describe Richard as a quiet, low-key presence at Castlewood whose IFS sessions often felt forced and uncomfortable but were sometimes insightful. Mark, on the other hand, was impossible to miss. He decorated his office with phallic African sculptures and, according to several former patients, constantly inserted sexual innuendos into conversation. One says Mark often asked leading questions, pressed for details, and "seemed to very much enjoy hearing the sexual-abuse stories." Frisch, the former research director, recalls how "Mark would sit with me and talk about the type of research that he was into and he would say things like, 'This research is just multi-orgasmic, isn't it? I just want to fuck it.'" One former patient testified in her lawsuit against Castlewood that Mark Schwartz instructed the members of her group therapy to masturbate, journal about their fantasies, and bring them back to the group to share. (Mark denied the allegation in court papers.)

One of the first tasks for new patients at Castlewood was to write long narratives about their lives, including any instances of trauma or abuse, and read it aloud to their peers during group sessions. Many found the exercise excruciating. "Not only do you have to share and expose all of these things about yourself, but you're also hearing everyone else's very significant trauma, which is derailing in a lot of ways. It's very triggering," says MacDonald, the former patient. She was also troubled by the degree to which she says therapists defined experiences for her, as in "that was abusive, or you're being codependent," in ways that felt inaccurate. "People who are in a vulnerable and fragile place are not necessarily going to question that."

"He talked a lot about repressed sexual-abuse memories, which I hadn't personally raised," says another patient, Julia Williams, referring to Mark. Patients were encouraged "to do deep dives into these distinct inner identities and have them write letters to your abuser or your boss." Another former client at Castlewood says she observed the effects of IFS in real time during group sessions. A therapist might ask, "'If you have a part named Jane, does this part Jane have a favorite food? Does this part have a favorite color? Does this part talk differently?' They would almost suggest things, and all someone would have to do is be like, 'Oh yeah, maybe she talks like this,' and in creating this person in their head, they believed it themselves, too," the former patient recalls.

The therapists were so convinced that everyone had multiple personalities, the former patient claims, "that they were just finding them. But there were people who eventually, even while they were there, said, 'You know, I can't keep track of the names of my parts anymore … This is too hard to pretend.'" Cristy McMahon, whom Mark and Lori treated at another facility, says she created a PowerPoint documenting all her parts.

"The healthier I got, I started to feel like, *Did I lie? Am I a liar?*" McMahon says. "That's the part that makes people trapped. It feels shameful to think you lied. So I just kept it quiet." In treatment, she came to falsely believe that her mother wanted to kill her, and she exaggerated stories of legitimate abuse by her father. "It was really hard to tell the truth anyway about a horrible circumstance, so to then realize you've spoken words of untruth — you'd rather just go silent and never talk to anyone than to say, 'Oh, I made a mistake,' and I think that that's where people get stuck. They can't undo the damage."

Like McMahon, some patients concluded that the memories of abuse were false and recanted their accusations. For others, the parts, and the memories stored within them, became all too real. "It's not hard to get you to close your eyes and be who they want you to be and say what they want you to say," once said Amy Fedor, another former patient who realized years later that she had falsely accused her father of abuse and didn't realize her mistake until after he died. "They made me sicker. That whole place destroyed my life."

Frisch, who worked at Castlewood in 2011 and is now a behavioral scientist in Minnesota, says she was let go when she started challenging the treatment protocol. (Mark denies this.) "It was not at all empirically based, they were keeping people based on the length of their insurance, and they were really stuck on this idea that at least half of their clients had multiple personalities," Frisch says. Her title was research director, but, she says, "there wasn't a desire for research so much as there was letting people know how great the program was."

In the years since, Frisch has concluded that the issues at Castlewood weren't just the result of possible bad actors but of IFS itself. "It is highly unethical and should not be practiced in the treatment of any recognized mental-health disorder — it's not appropriate for eating disorders and not appropriate as a primary mode of treatment," she says. "Part of the process of recovering from an eating disorder is to separate yourself from the disorder, but not like that. I imagine that the kids who were in treatment when I was there just have this loss as adults. They lived through their eating disorders, but at what cost?"

Of Richard Schwartz, Frisch claims, "Dick really wanted some recognition for his approach, and he knew fully what was going on. But he never said anything." In court documents, Mark Schwartz testified that he and Richard never disagreed on any aspects of the care at

Castlewood. After leaving the center, Richard sent an email instructing IFS trainers that memories of abuse can be fallible, but he denies that his method played a part in the breakdown of patients there. “There is a risk of clients coming up with false memories with any trauma therapy that focuses on healing past wounds. The key is to not assume any memories are necessarily accurate without corroboration. That is what I taught then and teach now,” he says.

Most of Castlewood’s methods, starting with its use of IFS and the focus on trauma, contradict the prevailing playbook for treating eating disorders. Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of all psychiatric disorders, and the standard treatment focuses on stabilizing patients via family-based therapy, nutritional interventions, and diet-focused sessions, according to the American Psychiatric Association. Dredging up harrowing memories can overwhelm already fragile psyches and may lead to self-harm, substance abuse, or other unhealthy coping behaviors.

To meet the standard of the evidence-based therapies guide from the Academy for Eating Disorders, a treatment would need to have more than one randomized controlled trial showing it was more effective than an alternative treatment. “Another reason for doing randomized control trials is that there’s an obligation to systematically track any harms that might happen,” says Thomas, the Harvard psychologist and eating-disorder specialist. To date, no such trials have been done on IFS as a treatment for any psychiatric disorder. (The strongest evidence supporting its usefulness, according to Richard Schwartz, is a 2013 study he co-wrote showing that a group of rheumatoid-arthritis patients reported improved joint pain, self-compassion, and depressive symptoms.)

“If someone needs to learn how to eat, this is not the time for them to talk to their child self,” says Brownstone. “There are some providers out there who just love treating trauma. They find it fascinating. But your interest in trauma should not be the driving force of your therapy right now. Your client needs stabilization.”

In 2014, a study found that nearly 81 percent of IFS therapists believed traumatic memories are often repressed, compared to just 19 percent of research psychologists. Last year, Brownstone and two researchers added to the growing body of work looking into IFS and its popularity in the field and social media in a paper they published with the Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy. They argued that even if high-functioning patients probably won’t develop multiple selves while exploring their “parts,” and plenty find it a helpful framework, it’s too untested a practice to be considered a safe form of psychotherapy. “Our concern is that encouraging splitting of the self into parts for those who struggle with reality testing might be disorganizing,” according to the paper. In the wrong hands, the potential for

injury is higher. “Clinicians using IFS who have not received sufficient training in trauma-informed care may be at particular risk of misusing IFS in ways that cause such harm.”

That’s because at precisely the moment when vulnerable individuals need their families the most, authority figures — intentionally or not — can reinterpret events in their life in ways that recast loved ones as problematic while elevating themselves to an infallible savior status. “We see it in the world of cults,” which often target people who can be easily split, says Brownstone. “If someone loses a primary caregiver because they’ve become convinced based on a false memory that that person abused them, that’s such a loss. If we can just sit with the gravity of that as a therapist, like, ‘Yeah, your therapy is important, but the person retaining important people in their life is more important.’”

At his house in Middletown in July, Bobby Lerz sits on a sofa with a glass of wine and a cat. Old family photos of Elizabeth as a girl with sandy-brown hair and a big smile hang on the walls. His wife, Irene, who has blue tear-filled eyes, sits next to me on another sofa, periodically taking breaks outside to collect herself.

In 2013, desperate to reconnect with his daughter, Bobby reached out to Richard Schwartz, who had treated Elizabeth at Castlewood. He thought it was odd that Schwartz asked him to sign a liability waiver before they spoke, but their conversation put him at ease. He recalls Schwartz telling him that he always thought Castlewood was a little bit off. He agreed to look at Elizabeth’s file and see what he could do. Two weeks later, Bobby received a package in the mail from the Cambridge Police Department in Massachusetts. He says it was a box filled with Elizabeth’s medical records and the abuse allegations with a sticky note attached that read “Found on a Park Bench.”

“A fucking park bench!” Bobby tells me. “He cares so little and is so scatterbrained and absent-minded and so weird that he leaves the most important file of my life on a park bench.”

Schwartz apologized and told him he’d been walking his dog, sat down to read the file, and somehow forgot it, Bobby recalls. (Schwartz declined to comment on the incident, citing confidentiality concerns.) That was the end of their communication. For the first time, Bobby started to research IFS in earnest. He realized that the names his daughter had called herself on the stand—firefighter, protector, manager—were the same terms Schwartz uses to describe people’s parts. “I got to meet a whole bunch of his IFS people in my daughter … This was not Sally, Jane, and Susie; these are *his* names that he comes up with.”

"This is the type of thing that happens when you break somebody up into 50 different parts," he says.

Bobby has come to believe that Schwartz distanced himself from Castlewood once the malpractice lawsuits were filed. Bobby couldn't afford to sue the Schwartzes and instead started a support group in 2012 to connect with other Castlewood "survivors." Dozens of people have come to the group over the years with their own allegations of implanted memories and false dissociative identity disorder diagnoses as well as insurance fraud, HIPAA violations, and sexual abuse at the hands of staff. With Castlewood shut down, members of the group are now targeting the chain of Alsana sister clinics in Alabama and California and Mark Schwartz's Harmony Place.

Among the people who have contacted Bobby recently is a California physician who asked not to be named. Her 29-year-old daughter went into treatment at the Monterey Alsana in 2022 and has since severed all contact. "What happened to his daughter is exactly what happened with my daughter," she tells me. Memories of physical and verbal abuse in the house emerged, which she says are false, and soon her daughter also stopped speaking to her own brother and every other relative on her side of the family. "She's a vulnerable person," the mother adds. "I just think she got under somebody's influence and that was it. They started telling her whatever it was she needed to hear."

Earlier this year, Bobby was contacted by a woman whose daughter was treated at Alsana Birmingham and said it "completely ruined my daughter's life." He has posted testimonials from others on his website about Kevin Miller and Jim Gerber — two former Castlewood psychiatrists who allegedly misdiagnosed numerous patients at the facility and are still practicing IFS in Missouri — as well as about Castlewood's former chief executive, Nancy Albus, who defended Mark Schwartz and Lori Galperin amid the lawsuits. (In a press release, Albus described the complaints as "the stuff of Hollywood"; Albus, Miller, and Gerber did not respond to requests for comment.)

In 2022, two former patients filed separate federal lawsuits against Alsana and its owner, Riverside Partners, and certain employees. One sued for negligence, fraud, sexual assault by a staff member, and inflicting emotional distress. The patient, who was suicidal, alleged that in her worst moments therapists insisted that she do IFS exercises. The only way to stop her self-harm was to "have her parts become unblended," they told her, according to the complaint. The other lawsuit made similar claims and alleged that her therapist was unlicensed and conducted inappropriate social relationships with patients. (The lawsuits were dismissed for technical reasons. Alsana did not respond to a request to comment.)

When I ask Bobby and Irene what they most want now, Irene starts to sob. “I wish I could just have five minutes to explain to him the damage he’s doing. I really don’t think he understands the power he holds,” she says.

“Who?” Bobby asks, “Dick or Mark?”

“Dick,” she says. “Dick is blinded by money. It has to stop.” Mark, she says, is just “evil.”

Bobby only wants to see his daughter again. “My love for her is unconditional and forever,” he says, confessing he had greeted me in the driveway hoping for a surprise. “In a perfect world, you showed up here with Elizabeth and reunited us.”

Elizabeth and I meet on Zoom in September. She is 30 and has long reddish-brown hair. She is shy during our conversation, which lasts about 40 minutes. She declined to be quoted. Unlike the patients who have disavowed accounts of abuse by family members, she stands by the accusations against her father and says she has no intention of reconciling with him. In fact, what seemed to upset her the most in discussing him was how his campaign to expose Castlewood may have hurt the therapists who, in her view, saved her life. She even wrote Mark Schwartz a letter apologizing for her father’s actions.

I reach Mark by phone in Monterey in September. He tells me he and Richard see each other occasionally. “I love the guy,” he said. In 2019, eight years after the initial wave of lawsuits against Castlewood were filed, Richard traveled to Harmony Place to join Mark and Lori in presenting a workshop on IFS, which they billed as a solution for trauma, dissociation, and intimacy issues.

When I ask Mark what he thinks went wrong at Castlewood, he doesn’t want to talk about it. “I don’t want to open that door because it’s bad energy. I put that behind me. But I don’t feel like we were doing anything that was not helpful.” Patients with eating disorders are among the most difficult to treat, and he took on a lot of challenging cases, he says. “I just think that in any clinic where you’re getting fairly big, there’s gonna be some clients who are angry —” He cuts himself off. “I’ve got to go,” he says. A patient was waiting.

Richard Schwartz now finds himself among a caste of New Age influencers, self-help authors, and academic outcasts with enormous social-media platforms. He regularly speaks around the world at tropical island retreats; next year, he is co-hosting an $8,700 ketamine-fueled “theradelic” week near Santa Cruz, California. His IFS Institute offers a lucrative suite of coursework for aspiring parts therapists, including workshops, retreats, and three levels of training — costing upwards of $11,000 for about three weeks of

classes — as well as certification ($400 up front, then $150 every two years). The annual conference sells $860 two-day passes.

Despite his ubiquity in the realm of wellness and spiritual capitalism, he is adamant about maintaining an aura of scientific credibility. He insists that IFS is evidence based and writes in professional bios that he is on the faculty of the Harvard Medical School. (Harvard clarified in an email that Schwartz is a non-faculty teaching associate at the Cambridge Health Alliance, which has an academic affiliation with Harvard but is independently owned.)

When I ask Richard about Bobby, he tells me he has only a "vague memory" of speaking to him. He quickly adds that he "feels for the families" that suffered as a result of Castlewood's practices. When I press him about the lawsuits, he gets flustered. "I don't want to speculate," he says. "I don't want to speak too much about that if you don't mind." He says he and Mark have not been in touch "for many years" and maintains IFS is safe and effective. The therapy "is really the opposite of fragmenting people," he says. Clients come into treatment with their parts already intact — like a bulb of garlic, rather than the layers of an onion, he has said — "It's not like I'm creating them." Instead, IFS therapists work on "rounding up all those outlying parts and bringing them back home."

The problem, in Schwartz's view, is that too many therapists are practicing IFS without proper training. "We can't police everything that's happening," he says. "I try to make a lot of public statements about how important it is and how dangerous it is to not have full training." Last year, the IFS Institute, which once accepted massage therapists for training, started requiring that enrollees hold a mental-health credential that allows them to practice in their state. Mark Schwartz, though, was personally trained by Richard. Was he also misusing IFS? "Yeah, I could go that far," Richard says.

He tells me his focus remains on spreading the gospel of the practice he created more than 30 years ago, which is still evolving. His new book, his 11th, is *No Bad Parts!* for children, and in December he's publishing Releasing Our Burdens with Hübl, an IFS approach to ancestral trauma. And earlier this year, Schwartz launched a video course on the spiritual, shamanic, and psychedelic dimensions of the self (available on sale for $297). On Instagram last month, he announced a new development in the evolution of IFS: Parts are actually "spirits." Schwartz knows this, he said, because he personally was "picked to bring this model" to the world. And these spirits don't only live in a patient's inner world but can enter in from the outside. Perhaps they are "the ancestors," he said. Or perhaps they are the invention of an ambitious therapist.

There is one more initiative Schwartz brings up, a collaboration with a group called the Compassion Prison Project. “We’re bringing IFS materials to prisoners all over the country,” he says.

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William and Kate Won Their Lawsuit Against *Paris Match*

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What We Know About the Monkeys on the Loose in Mississippi

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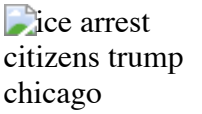
Your U.S. Citizenship Will Not Protect You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YESTERDAY AT 2:49 P.M.

Adults Are Ruining '6-7' for Halloween

Happy couple wearing eyeglasses and ghost costumes at Halloween party

YESTERDAY AT 2:00 P.M.

Everything Our Shopping Editors Are Buying From Amazon's Holiday Beauty Event

YESTERDAY AT 1:10 P.M.

Caitlyn Jenner Has Returned to the Kardashian-verse

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Billie Eilish Has Some Advice for Mark Zuckerberg

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Sydney Sweeney Got in on the Naked-Dress Trend

YESTERDAY AT 11:19 A.M.

The *Love Is Blind* Reunion Did Not Live Happily Ever After

YESTERDAY AT 10:49 A.M.

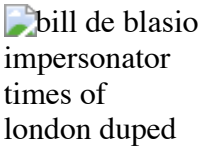
How to Help Families Losing SNAP Benefits

YESTERDAY AT 10:00 A.M.

Funnel-Neck Jackets Are Trending for Fall — Is This Helsa One Worth $648?

YESTERDAY AT 9:28 A.M.

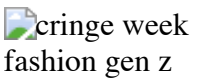
The Bill de Blasio Impersonator Says He's Innocent



PERSONAL FINANCE | YESTERDAY AT 8:00 A.M.

Taking GLP-1s to Get Ahead at Work "The truth is, I'm taking it because I'm afraid not to."

By Charlotte Cowles



YESTERDAY AT 7:00 A.M.

Is Showing My Ankles Really a Fashion Crime?

LIFE IN PICTURES | YESTERDAY AT 7:00 A.M.

Misty Copeland's Final Bow A photo diary of the dancer's last day as a principal for the American Ballet Theatre.

By Henry Leutwyler

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